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How Cost Effective Are the Hassles of Practice?

A THOUGHTFUL SURVEY by Denson and Manning appearing elsewhere in this issue draws attention to the extent that problems other than those directly related to the care of patients occupy the minds and the time of practicing physicians. The extent is considerable and disturbing. By far the largest number of the 2,745 physicians surveyed reported government regulation of medical practice as the most significant current problem in their practices while only a very small minority placed diagnosis, therapy or doctor-patient rela-

tionships as their most important concerns. What might be called the hassles of today's practice environment made up most of the other top problems cited by these physicians, and they together with government regulation of medical practice make up the overwhelming majority of what are seen as the most significant problems of practice.

One can only conclude that there is an enormous amount of wasteful and no doubt costly friction in the machinery of daily practice as it is done today. Most of this friction is generated by forces impinging upon what might be called nuclear patient care—the interaction that takes place between a doctor and a patient who is seeking advice or care. Most of these forces are seen to arise from the external environment of medical practice and represent social, economic or political interventions usually for the purpose of controlling costs or, less often, to assure quality, which now have become more or less accreted to the machinery of patient care. One can only wonder how much or how often this superimposed friction really results in better or less expensive care. There are few data on either the cost or the benefit, but Denson and Manning have pointed to a problem.

—MSMW